DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 470 597 CG 032 075

AUTHOR	Malone, James F.
TITLE	Working towards Effective Practices in Distance Career Counseling. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services, Greensboro, NC.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-CG-02-03
PUB DATE	2002-12-00
NOTE	4p.
CONTRACT	ED-99-CO-0014
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Counseling and Student Services Clearinghouse, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 201 Ferguson Building, P.O. Box 26171, Greensboro, NC 27402-6171. Tel: 336-334-4114; Tel: 800-414-9769 (Toll Free); Fax: 336-334-4116; e-mail: ericcass@uncg.edu; Web site: http://ericcass.uncg.edu.
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Career Counseling; *Computer Mediated Communication; *Counseling Techniques; Counselor Training; *Distance Education; *Technology Uses in Education
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

The time is ripe to focus on early field reports from practitioners who are using distance methodologies in career counseling. The focus is the actual establishment of a working alliance or counseling relationship through the use of technology and then the continuation of the counseling work using technology-assisted methodologies such as synchronous/asynchronous e-mail, telecounseling and videoconferencing. This digest focuses on initial research as well as reports from actual distance career counseling practitioners and clients. It examines counseling techniques and interventions that work effectively, and briefly addresses the importance of training and supervision for distance career counselors. (GCP)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made

ED 470 597

Working towards Effective Practices in Distance Career Counseling

ERIC/CASS Digest

by

James F. Malone

December 2002 EDO-CG-02-03

ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CG032075

ERIC CASS DIGEST

Working Towards Effective Practices in Distance Career Counseling

James F. Malone

2002
EDO-CG-02-03

The environment surrounding current work with clients using Internet-related and technology-assisted strategies has been likened to the pioneering experience of those intrepid individuals who settled the "Wild West" (Bloom & Walz, 2000). To carry the metaphor forward, some early settlements have been established, and efforts are continuing towards creating communities of counseling and teaching practice throughout this new terrain. While the professional counseling literature continues to weigh the pros and cons of online and other forms of distance counseling, delivery models and specific practice techniques helpful to clients are being developed (Harris-Bowlsbey, Riley Dikel & Sampson, 2002).

The time is ripe to focus on early field reports from practitioners who are using distance methodologies in career counseling. It is important to understand that we are talking about a communication process which goes beyond Computer Assisted Guidance Systems (CAGS) or Computer Information Dissemination Systems (CIDS), both of which have been useful counseling support strategies for many years. Our focus here is the actual establishment of a working alliance or counseling relationship through the use of technology and then the continuation of the counseling work using technology-assisted methodologies such as synchronous/asynchronous e-mail, telecounseling and videoconferencing. These counseling communication strategies may certainly be enhanced by Internet resources as well as by other more traditional technology-assisted supports. This digest focuses on initial research as well as reports from actual distance career counseling practitioners and clients. It also examines counseling techniques and interventions that work effectively. Brief commentary addresses the importance of training and supervision for distance career counselors.

What Are Some Effective Distance Career Counseling Practices?

It makes sense for counselors to approach the issue of effective distance career counseling interventions by taking a careful look at the research that examines helpful face-to-face counseling practices. Sexton (1999) makes an excellent case regarding the need for professional counselors to embrace a commitment to evidence-based counseling practice. Research and practice go hand-in-hand, and counselors who are designing or delivering distance-based models of career counseling need to consider the meta-analytic research results about face-to-face career choice process and outcomes from Brown and Ryan Krane (2000). Their work identifies specific elements which promise successful outcomes: comprehensive client assessment where the results are interpreted to the client with the assistance of a trained counselor; linking these results to related exploration of educational and employment decisions; modeling of successful individuals engaged in areas of similar career interest; written action plans with concrete goals and timetables; and finally, the overall support system provided by an ongoing counseling presence.

Distance career counselors in a variety of service settings are beginning to take stock of their efforts and interventions. School and university career services professionals as well as agency counselors and private practitioners, who are engaged in delivering distance services to clients, are seeking guidelines and standards from their professional organizations. Based on positive, constructive, and useful feedback gained from clients and drawing on their own insightful evaluations, professionals in the field recommend the following specific distance career counseling practices (Malone, Miller & Miller, in press):

• **A Clear and Comprehensive Website**, which fully informs potential clients about the design and delivery of services, ethical and legal issues such as privacy and confidentiality, fee structure, possible risks to confidentiality due to the service delivery media, the professional counseling relationship and other issues relevant to informed consent. This information helps clients to develop realistic expectations as well as a level of comfort and confidence about the counseling they will receive.

• **A Comprehensive, Technology-Assisted Pre-Counseling In-Take Registration and Assessment Protocol**, which includes the use of validated Internet instruments and open-ended questionnaires. These approaches allow clients to share expressed interests, skills and values as well as additional qualitative information, which is based on their actual employment experience. This practice facilitates both the initial building of the counseling relationship as well as exploring the issues and goals for the counseling. The counselor is able to begin conceptualizing a pre-counseling plan, which may be confirmed as the actual counseling begins.

• **Personalized Selection and Assignment of A Well-Matched Counselor**, which helps to ensure the building of an effective working alliance. The client may begin establishing a relationship with a counselor who is competent in, familiar with and able to anticipate individualized, specific career counseling needs.

• **Technology-Assisted Strategies**, which facilitate efficient and personalized communication between counselor and client. The use of e-mail/chat, telecounseling or video-conferencing technologies allow for various types of welcome messages and session planning contacts, which prepare both client and counselor for the actual counseling sessions. It is important for distance career counselors to orient their clients to certain communication characteristics that are operative in the distance counseling relationship. In telecounseling, for example, the counselor invites the client to share feelings more readily or to anticipate clarifying inquiries from the counselor from time to time due to the lack of visual cues. Additionally, the sessions may be a bit more structured than face-to-face contacts. In order to maintain contact between sessions, various asynchronous communication strategies may be employed such as secure e-mail or private message posting.

• **Structured Distance Career Counseling Interventions**, which appear to be quite effective for clients according to emerging research studies. Counselors report that following a somewhat structured counseling interview format, which certainly allows for individual client needs and spontaneity, tends to work very well in distance models. The Distance Career Counselor does well to use some sort of template, such as the recursive career development process: ***assessment<>exploration<>decision-making<>self-***

marketing, both as a context for evaluating career planning needs and as a set of service categories from which to draw specific counseling interventions. This approach allows for the identification of, and working towards, specific goals within the career development process such as relating assessment results to appropriate exploration, making career or educational decisions and acting on steps in the self-marketing process. It is also imperative that the working alliance is continuously nurtured as counselor and client mutually agree upon the issues and goals for each session with appropriate follow-up activities for both the counselor and the client. While these practices apply to face-to-face counseling scenarios, they are especially important in distance work due to the logistical and communication challenges involved.

• **Maintaining Counselor-Client Contact Between Sessions,** which continues to support the counseling relationship. Using technology-assisted means such as e-mail or personal page message posting, both counselor and client may share information, clarify questions and make progress towards counseling goals. These practices extend the counseling over time and space in an efficient and convenient manner. Clients do not have to wait for office hours or next week's appointment, if they need more timely assistance.

• **Providing Clients with Thoughtful, Written Feedback from Their Counseling Sessions,** which provides a meaningful and insightful review of the counseling experience with implications for follow-up action. The distance career counselor prepares and forwards to the client a summary of the counseling contacts, which may include stated goals, to what degree and how they were met, barriers and challenges to these goals, specific action steps as part of a plan with a timetable, and a synthesis of career assessment that is appropriately related to resources and strategies for exploration, decision-making and/or self-marketing. Additional research suggests that written communication provides clients and counselors with deeper insights than initially expected and enhances the career planning process in a profound way (Boer, 2001). Such a document keeps the client on course and may continue to provide motivation even after the counseling comes to a close. This documentation may also suggest strategies for post-termination, follow-up communication, which enable the client and counselor to stay in touch as needed via convenient, technology-assisted distance counseling strategies.

• **Evaluating Distance Career Counseling Practices,** which gives clients an opportunity to express what they feel were more or less effective counselor interventions. Detailed questionnaire surveys about the counselor, the counseling relationship, the distance delivery model, resources and the overall experience provide valuable critical insights so counselors and supervisors can measure effective outcomes for this new form of delivery. This type of evaluation technique is especially valuable during this early phase of development for distance career counseling.

Concluding Remarks

Many counselors are clearly feeling their way towards engaging in the practice of distance counseling. While distance career counseling may pose fewer threats and complications to client confidentiality than more clinical forms of distance counseling, it is nevertheless a relatively new and uncharted professional venture, which calls for specialized training and supervision. Identifying effective practices in face-to-face career counseling and then adapting them for distance delivery is a sensible as well as exciting trail to blaze. The integration of innovative counseling service delivery with technology presents several accompanying challenges for counselor education, training and ongoing supervision. The central goal of supervision in counseling is to ensure the delivery of quality services and care to clients. Even experienced career counselors need assistance in understanding the theoretical bases and practical details of delivering distance services. A variety of difficult situations may arise, ranging from questions about making referrals to privacy issues and assistance with technology. Appropriate training that includes demonstration of relevant competencies along with a structured, reliable supervision model will be the cornerstones of a solid distance career counseling structure. These issues need to be addressed formally, perhaps in the form of a distance career counseling certification process, if counselors hope to deliver effective interventions to their clients.

References

Boer, P. M. (2001). *Career counseling over the Internet: An emerging model for Trusting and responding to online clients.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Bloom, J. W. & Walz, G. R. (Eds). (2000). *Cybercounseling and cyberlearning: Strategies for the millennium* (p. 407). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.

Brown, S. D. & Krane, R. N. (2000). *Four (or five) sessions and a cloud of dust: Old assumptions and new observations about career counseling.* In S. D. Brown and R. W. Lent (Eds.), Handbook of Counseling Psychology (pp.740-766). New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.

Harris-Bowlsbey, J., Riley Dikel, M., & Sampson, J. P., Jr. (2002). *The Internet: A tool for career planning.* Tulsa, OK: National Career Development Association.

Malone, J. F., Miller, K. S., & Miller, R. M. (in press). The evolution of the ReadyMinds model of distance career counseling: Implications for training, practice and supervision of Cybercounselors. In J.W. Bloom & G.R. Walz (Eds.), *Cybercounseling and cyberlearning: Encore.* Greensboro, NC: ERIC Counseling and Student Services Clearinghouse.

Sexton, T. L. (1999). *Evidence-based counseling: Implications for counseling practice, preparation, and professionalism.* (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No.ED 435948).

James F. Malone is the Director of Career Counseling and Training for ReadyMinds, an online Distance Career Counseling Company whose corporate office is located in New York City.

ERIC Digests are in the public domain and may be freely reproduced and disseminated. This publication was funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Contract No. ED-99-CO-0014. Opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions of the U.S. Department of Education, OERI, or ERIC/CASS.

For information on other ERIC/CASS products and services, please call toll-free (800) 414-9769 or (336) 334-4114 or fax (336) 334-4116 or write ERIC/CASS, School of Education, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, NC 27402.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

[ ] This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.

[X] This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").